

**THE
100**
**A RANKING OF
THE MOST INFLUENTIAL
PERSONS IN HISTORY**

Michael H. Hart

A Citadel Press Book
Published by Carol Publishing Group

*To the memory of my father, without
whose encouragement and inspiration
this book would never have been written*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would particularly like to thank Dr. J. Richard Gott, III for the many insights he provided me on the historical significance of various individuals. Discussions with Harrison Roth and with Donald Archer have also proven most helpful.

The encouragement and assistance of my mother and my sister is gratefully acknowledged. Most of all, I wish to thank my wife, Sherry, whose help in both the research and the writing contributed so greatly to this book.

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PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

Today, a dozen years after *The 100* was first published, the book is still selling well, and translations into other languages keep appearing. Why then, should there be a revised edition of the book?

One reason for making revisions is that history did not come to a halt in 1978, when the first edition of this book was written. On the contrary, many new events have occurred since then—some of them quite unanticipated—and new historical figures have emerged. Even had my knowledge of the past been perfect twelve years ago, this book would still need revising, because the world has changed since then.

Of course, my knowledge of the past was far from perfect in 1978. In the intervening years, I have (I hope) learned a lot from my own studies, and in addition, the response to my book has been educational. Many of the letters I received from readers mentioned historical facts that I had overlooked; or they pointed out new—and often better—ways of interpreting the facts I already knew. The same is true of many remarks made by callers-in to radio talk shows where I was a guest. A second reason, therefore, for this edition is to correct some of the shortcomings of the first.

One of the most difficult (and interesting) tasks involved in writing *The 100* was evaluating the relative importance of various political leaders. We all tend to overestimate the importance of current heads of state. They seem to us like giants; whereas statesmen who lived a few centuries ago—and who seemed every bit as important to *their* contemporaries—are now nearly forgotten.

It is far easier to evaluate the significance of an ancient leader. We can see the consequences—or at least the aftermath—of his or her actions, and can use that information to estimate the person's importance. To estimate the importance of a current political figure is much harder. No matter how powerful a leader seems today, and

no matter how innovative, it is difficult to foretell how long his or her influence will endure.

A case in point is my ranking (#20) of Mao Tse-tung (now spelled *Mao Zedong*) in the first edition. That edition was written shortly after the death of Mao, when the memory of his achievements was still fresh. Of course, I realized at the time that Mao's importance would probably fade as the years went by; but I greatly underestimated the extent and swiftness of that decline. Within a few years of Mao's death, the reforms instituted by his successor (Deng Xiaoping) have drastically altered many of Mao's most cherished policies. Since Deng seems to be undoing a good deal of Mao's program, it has been apparent for some time that the first edition of this book seriously overestimated Mao's long-term importance.

But this edition is not being written merely in order to change the ranking of a single person. Much more has happened in the past decade than just the decline of Mao's influence. When the first edition of this book was being written, it seemed as though the Communist movement—as dreadful as it appeared to me—was so firmly entrenched in so many countries, and so skilled and ruthless in its hold on power, that it might well endure for many decades, perhaps even for centuries; indeed, it might even succeed in triumphing over a West that was more humane, but less determined.

If that was so, then the founders of the Communist system (Marx, Lenin, Stalin) were all extremely influential men. However, the events of the past few years have shown that the Communist system was not nearly as powerful, nor as firmly entrenched, as I had feared. In fact, the decline of Marxism is the most striking historical feature of the past decade.

The entire Soviet empire in Eastern Europe has collapsed, and the liberated countries have all renounced Communism. Various other countries (such as Ethiopia and Mongolia) that had once been client states of the Soviet Union have also abandoned Marxism. The Soviet Union itself has disintegrated and has been re-

placed by fifteen independent republics, and none of them are retaining the Marxist-Leninist system.

There are still a few Communist governments remaining in the world—Vietnam, North Korea, Cuba, Laos, and the People's Republic of China. But none of those are strong economically, and none seem secure. Although over a billion people still live under Communist tyrannies, and though a resurgence of Marxism is still theoretically possible, it would not be surprising if, ten or twenty years from now, there was not even *one* Communist government left in the whole world!

It follows that the founders of the Communist system were far less important figures than I had originally estimated. And it suggests that various persons whose ideas are particularly antithetical to Communism—men such as Thomas Jefferson and Adam Smith—were probably more influential than I had estimated in the first edition.

It also suggests that a new name should be added to the list of influential persons. Mikhail Gorbachev was the leader of the Soviet Union during its last fateful years (1985–1991). His policies and his actions—and his inactions at critical junctures!—were a major factor in the end of the Cold War, the decline of Communism, and the breakup of the Soviet Union. In view of the enormous importance of these events, Gorbachev has been included in this edition. He has been ranked in position #95, somewhat below Lenin, but far higher than most of the famous political leaders of the past.

Another revision—and one which is likely to be controversial—is my inclusion of Edward de Vere as the real “William Shakespeare,” rather than the man from Stratford-on-Avon who is described as the author by most “orthodox” textbooks. This change was only made reluctantly: It represents an admission that I made a serious error in the first edition when, without carefully checking the facts, I simply “followed the crowd” and accepted the Stratford man as the author of the plays. Since then, I have carefully examined the arguments on both sides of the question and have con-

cluded that the weight of the evidence is heavily against the Stratford man, and in favor of de Vere.

I regret that, in a book this size, space does not permit the inclusion of *all* the arguments which show that Edward de Vere, rather than the Stratford man, was the author of the plays. I hope that the facts presented in my article will be sufficient for most readers. For a fuller and more detailed exposition the interested reader might consult the excellent book by Charlton Ogburn, *The Mysterious William Shakespeare*, which is perhaps the definitive book on this interesting topic.

Besides Gorbachev, two other persons—Ernest Rutherford and Henry Ford—have been included in this revised edition who were not in the original book.

Rutherford was one of the most celebrated scientists of the twentieth century. I am not sure how I managed to overlook him when I wrote the first edition, and several scientists expressed surprise at my omission. On reviewing his scientific accomplishments, I have concluded that his contributions to modern atomic theory exceed those of Niels Bohr (who was #100 in the first edition), while his contributions to our knowledge of radioactivity were more important than those of Becquerel (who was #58).

Henry Ford was one of the “honorable mentions” in the first edition. However, many readers wrote in, claiming that I had underestimated his importance, and presenting reasons why he should have been included in the first hundred. On reconsidering the matter, I have concluded that the critics were right, and I have altered this edition accordingly.

One should not infer, though, that the revised edition is simply the result of a poll. It was not the *number* of objecting letters which caused me to change my mind about Ford—indeed, I received more objections on some other points—but the soundness of the reasoning in those letters. The rankings in this book are, for better or worse, my own opinions, not some consensus of readers or experts.

To make room for the three additions to the top hundred (Gorbachev, Rutherford, and Ford), it was necessary to delete three

persons who had been included in that group in the first edition. Those three men are: Niels Bohr, Pablo Picasso, and Antoine Henri Becquerel. This, of course, does not in any way imply that I consider them to be *unimportant* figures. On the contrary, those three—like most of those listed as honorable mentions, and like many other men and women whom I have not had the space to mention—were talented and influential persons who have helped create this fascinating world we live in.

Michael H. Hart
January 1992

We see, then, how far the monuments of wit and learning are more durable than the monuments of power or of the hands. For have not the verses of Homer continued twenty-five hundred years or more, without the loss of a syllable or letter; during which time infinite palaces, temples, castles, cities, have been decayed and demolished?

FRANCIS BACON

The Advancement of Learning (1605)

INTRODUCTION

In his book *Letters on the English*, Voltaire relates that during his stay in England, in 1726, he overheard some learned men discussing the question: who was the greatest man—Caesar, Alexander, Tamerlane, or Cromwell? One speaker maintained that Sir Isaac Newton was beyond a doubt the greatest man. Voltaire agreed with this judgment, for: “It is to him who masters our minds by the force of truth, and not to those who enslave them by violence, that we owe our reverence.”

Whether Voltaire was truly convinced that Sir Isaac Newton was the greatest man who ever lived or was simply trying to make a philosophical point, the anecdote raises an interesting question: of the billions of human beings who have populated the earth, which persons have most influenced the course of history?

This book presents my own answer to that question, my list of the 100 persons in history whom I believe to have been the most influential. I must emphasize that this is a list of the *most influential* persons in history, not a list of the *greatest*. For example, there is room in my list for an enormously influential, wicked, and heartless man like Stalin, but no place at all for the saintly Mother Cabrini.

This book is solely involved with the question of who were the 100 persons who had the greatest effect on history and on the course of the world. I have ranked these 100 persons in order of importance: that is, according to the total amount of influence that each of them had on human history and on the everyday lives of other human beings. Such a group of exceptional people, whether noble or reprehensible, famous or obscure, flamboyant or modest, cannot fail to be interesting; they are the people who have shaped our lives and formed our world.

Before composing such a catalogue, it is necessary to formulate the ground rules as to who is eligible for inclusion and on what basis. The first rule is that only *real* persons are eligible for consideration. That rule is sometimes difficult to apply; for example, did the Chinese sage Lao Tzu actually exist, or is he merely a legendary figure? How about Homer? How about Aesop, the putative author of the famous *Aesop's Fables*? In cases such as these, where the facts are uncertain, I have been obliged to make a guess—an educated guess, I trust—based on the information available.

Anonymous persons are also disqualified. Obviously the individual who invented the wheel—if indeed the wheel was invented by a single person—was a very influential figure, probably far more important than most of the people listed in this book. However, under the rules that I postulate, that individual, along with the inventor of writing, and all the other anonymous benefactors of the human race, has been excluded from consideration.

In composing this list, I have not simply selected the most famous or prestigious figures in history. Neither fame, nor talent, nor nobility of character is the same thing as influence. Thus, Benjamin Franklin, Martin Luther King, Jr., Babe Ruth, and even Leonardo da Vinci are omitted from this list—although some find a place among the Honorable Mentions that follow the One Hundred. On the other hand, influence is not always exerted benevolently; thus, an evil genius such as Hitler meets the criteria for inclusion.

Since the influence with which we are concerned must be averaged over the world at large, the names of many outstanding political figures whose influence was primarily local are absent. However, a significant impact on one important country is equivalent to a less commanding influence affecting the entire earth; thus, Peter the Great of Russia, whose influence extended primarily to his own country, appears on my list.

I have not confined my list to persons who have affected the *present* situation of mankind. Influence on past generations was taken equally into account.

What about the future? In ranking the men and women in this book, I considered the influence that their accomplishments may have on future generations and events. Since our knowledge of the future is severely limited, it is obvious I could not estimate continued influence with anything approaching certitude. Nevertheless, it seems safe to predict that electricity, for example, will still be important 500 years from now, and the contributions of such scientists as Faraday and Maxwell will therefore continue to affect the daily lives of our remote descendants.

In deciding exactly where to place an individual, I gave much weight to the importance of the historical movement to which he contributed. Generally speaking, major historical developments are never due to the actions of one person alone. Because this book is concerned with *individual, personal influence*, I have tried to divide the credit for a given development in proportion to each participant's contribution. Individuals, therefore, are not ranked in the same order as would be the important events or movements with which they are associated. Sometimes a person who is almost exclusively responsible for a significant event or movement has been ranked higher than one who played a less dominant role in a more important movement.

A striking example of this is my ranking Muhammad higher than Jesus, in large part because of my belief that Muhammad had a much greater personal influence on the formulation of the Moslem religion than Jesus had on the formulation of the Christian religion. This does not imply, of course, that I think Muhammad was a *greater* man than Jesus.

There are some important developments to which a large number of persons contributed, but in which no one individual was of overriding importance. A good illustration is the development of explosives and firearms; another is the women's liberation movement; still another is the rise and evolution of Hinduism. Although each of these developments is of major importance, if credit were apportioned among the many contributors, no one person would qualify for inclusion on this list.

Would it then be advisable to choose a representative individual for each of these developments, and to accord that person

all of the credit? I think not. Under such a procedure, the Hindu philosopher Sankara would appear near the top of the list as a representative of Hinduism. But Sankara himself is neither particularly famous—he is virtually unknown outside India—nor outstandingly influential. Similarly, it would strike me as frivolous to rank Richard Gatling, the inventor of an early model of machine gun, higher than Albert Einstein, purely on the grounds that the evolution of firearms was more important than the formulation of the theory of relativity. In all such cases, I have decided *not* to try to choose a “first among equals.” Each person included in this book has been selected on the basis of his or her actual influence, rather than as a representative of an important movement.

Where two individuals, in close collaboration, have produced what is essentially a joint accomplishment, a special rule has been adopted. For example, Orville and Wilbur Wright worked so closely together in inventing the airplane that it is nearly impossible to separate their individual contributions. In this case, it seems pointless to attempt to ascertain the proportion of credit due to each man, and then to assign each man a separate place on the list. Instead, the two men have been treated as a joint entry.

Like the Wright brothers, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels share a chapter, although it is headed only by the name of Marx, whom I consider the more important of the two. A few other joint contributors have been treated in the same fashion. Let me stress that this rule about joint entry does not apply to persons who merely worked in the same general field, but only to close collaborators.

There is one other factor, which it has been suggested, should be considered in determining an individual's place on this list. In retrospect, we can see that if Guglielmo Marconi had not invented the radio, some other person would have done so within a few years. Similarly, it seems likely that Mexico would have been conquered by Spain even had Hernando Cortés never existed, and that the theory of evolution would have been formulated without Charles Darwin. But these accomplishments

were *actually* carried out by Marconi, Cortés, and Darwin, respectively. These three men have therefore been ranked on this list in accordance with their achievements, and the argument that "it would have happened anyway" has been disregarded.

On the other hand, a few rare people were responsible for important events that might *never* have occurred without them. In assessing and ranking these people—an oddly-mixed group whose members include Genghis Khan, Beethoven, Muhammad, and William the Conqueror—their particular achievements have been assigned greater weight, because these individuals have been personally influential in the profoundest sense of the term.

Of the tens of billions of individuals who have inhabited the world, fewer than one in a million is listed in a large biographical dictionary. Of the perhaps twenty thousand individuals whose achievements have merited mention in biographical dictionaries, only about one-half of one percent are included on this list. Thus, every person on this list, in my opinion, is one of the truly monumental figures of history.

The influence of women on human affairs, as well as the contributions that females have made to human civilization, is obviously far greater than might be indicated by their numbers in this list. But a galaxy of influential figures will naturally be composed of individuals who had both the talent *and* the opportunity to exert a great influence. Throughout history, women have generally been denied such opportunities, and my inclusion of only two females is simply a reflection of that regrettable truth. I see no point in trying to cover up the disagreeable fact of discrimination by adding a few token women to my list. This book is based on what actually *did* occur in the past; not on what should have occurred, or on what might have occurred had human institutions been more equitable. Similar observations might be made concerning various racial or ethnic groups whose members have been disadvantaged in the past.

I have stressed that influence has been the sole criterion in ranking the individuals in this compendium. It would, of course,

be possible to construct lists of "outstanding persons," based on other criteria, such as fame, prestige, talent, versatility, and nobility of character.

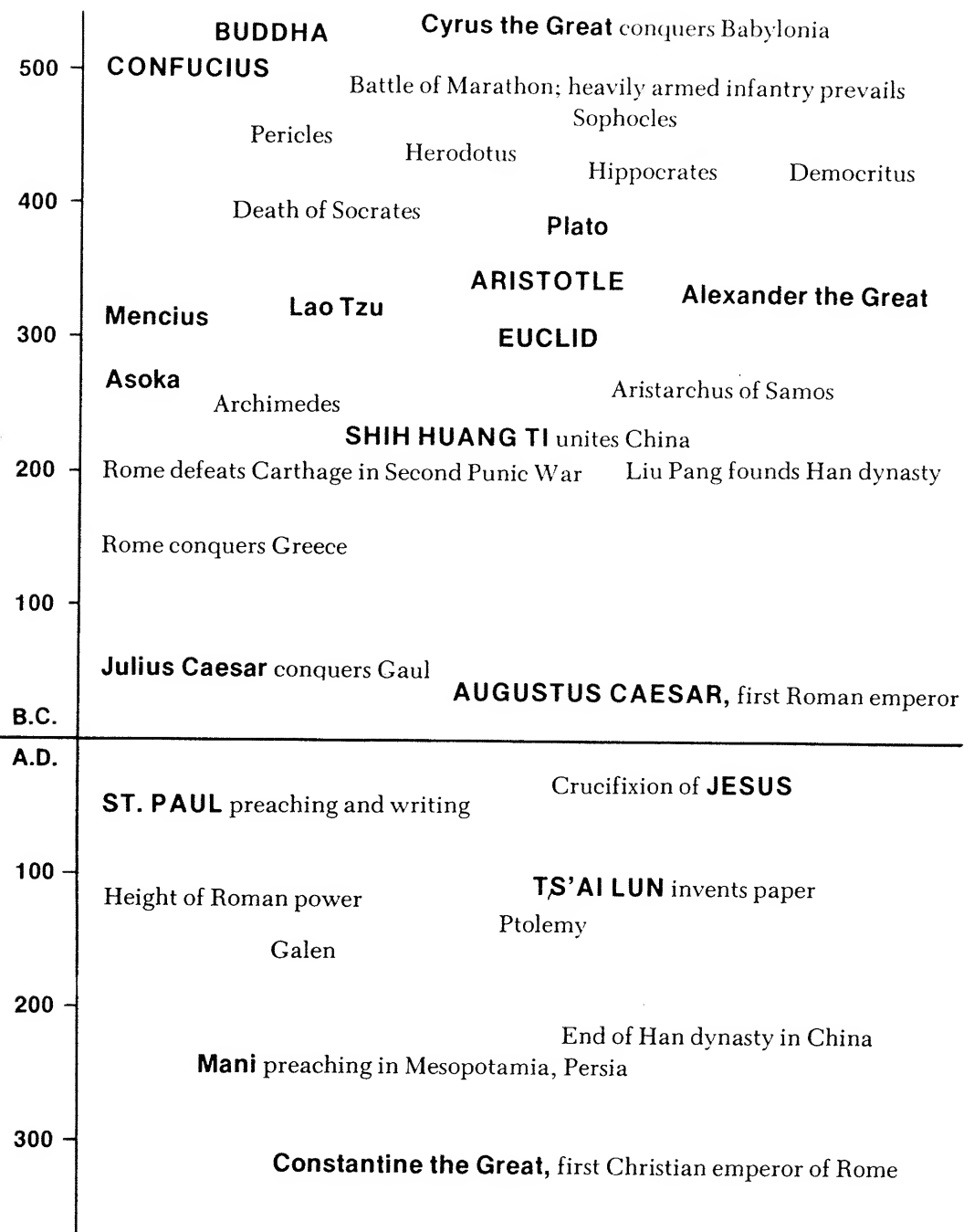
You, the reader, are urged to experiment by composing your own list—whether it be of the most influential, or of the most outstanding, or of otherwise superlative personages in any particular field. I have found the creation of this book on the one hundred most influential figures both fascinating and entertaining, and I am confident that you, too, will enjoy the intellectual exercise of assembling your own list or lists. Your list of names will not and need not coincide with mine. You may prefer to ponder, for example, the one hundred most powerful individuals who ever lived, or the one hundred most charismatic characters. But should you choose to nominate the most *influential* figures, I hope the exercise will open up for you, as it did for me, a new perspective on history.

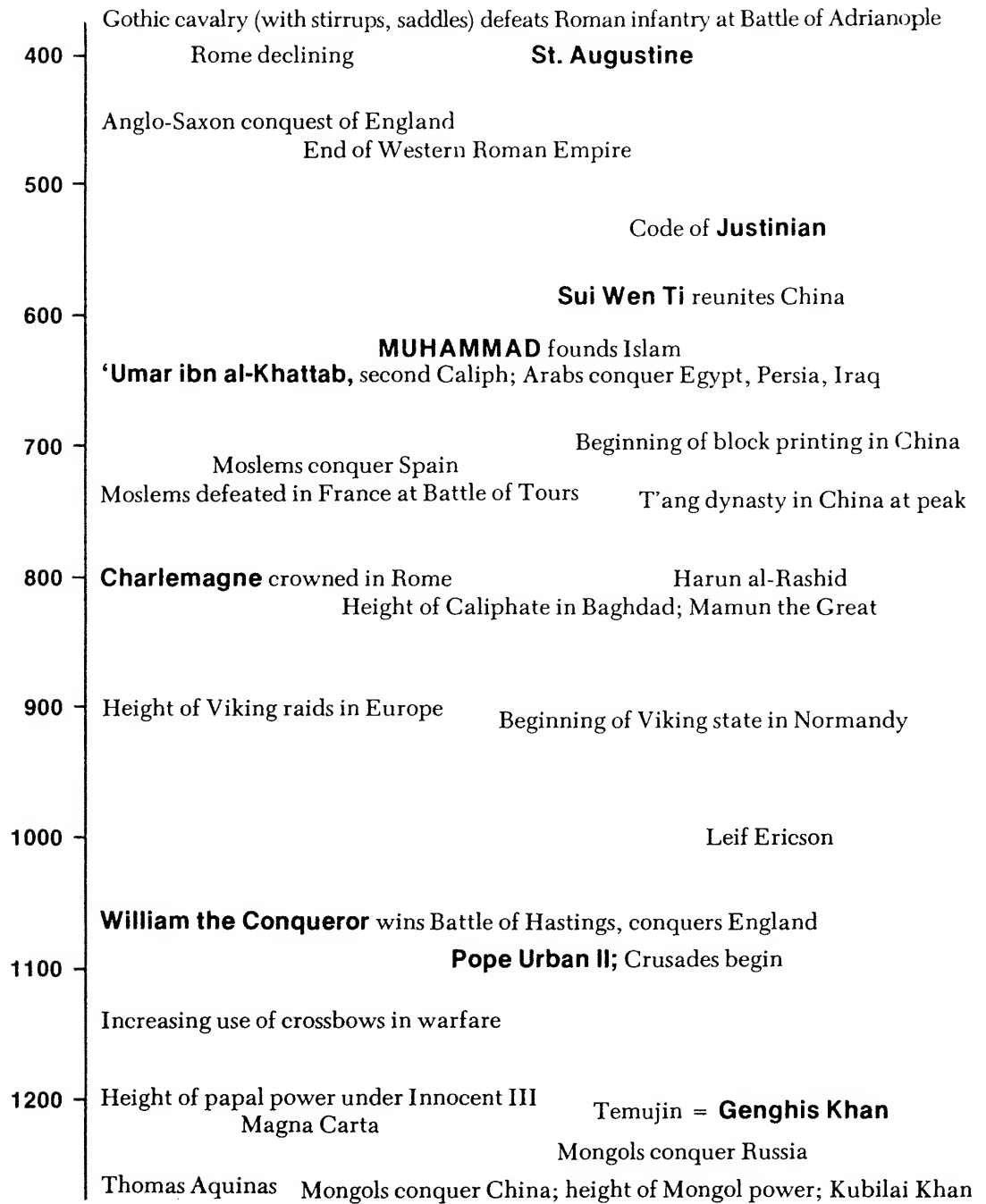
HISTORICAL CHART

Some Important Events and Developments

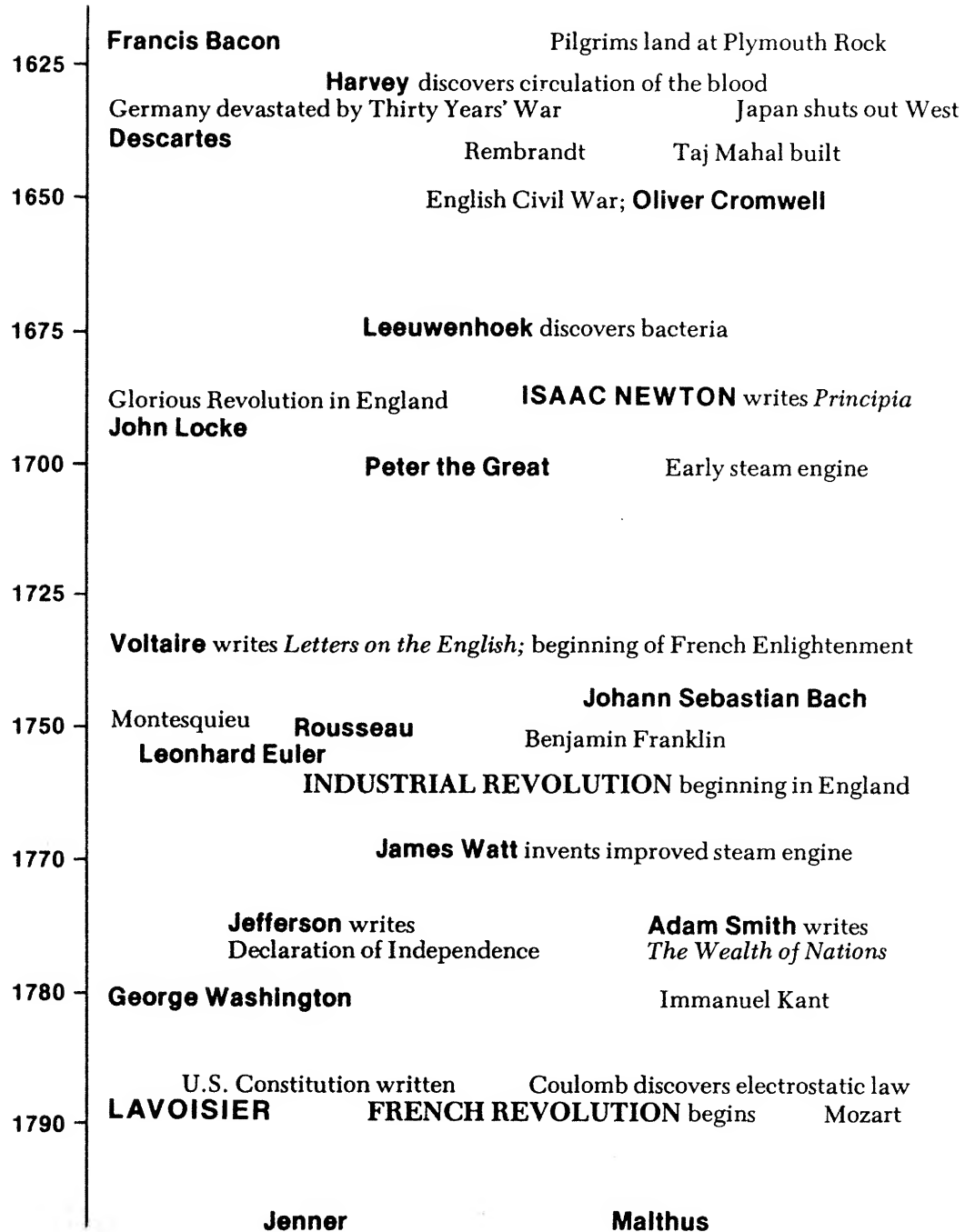
NOTE: The names of the first twenty people in this book appear in full caps.

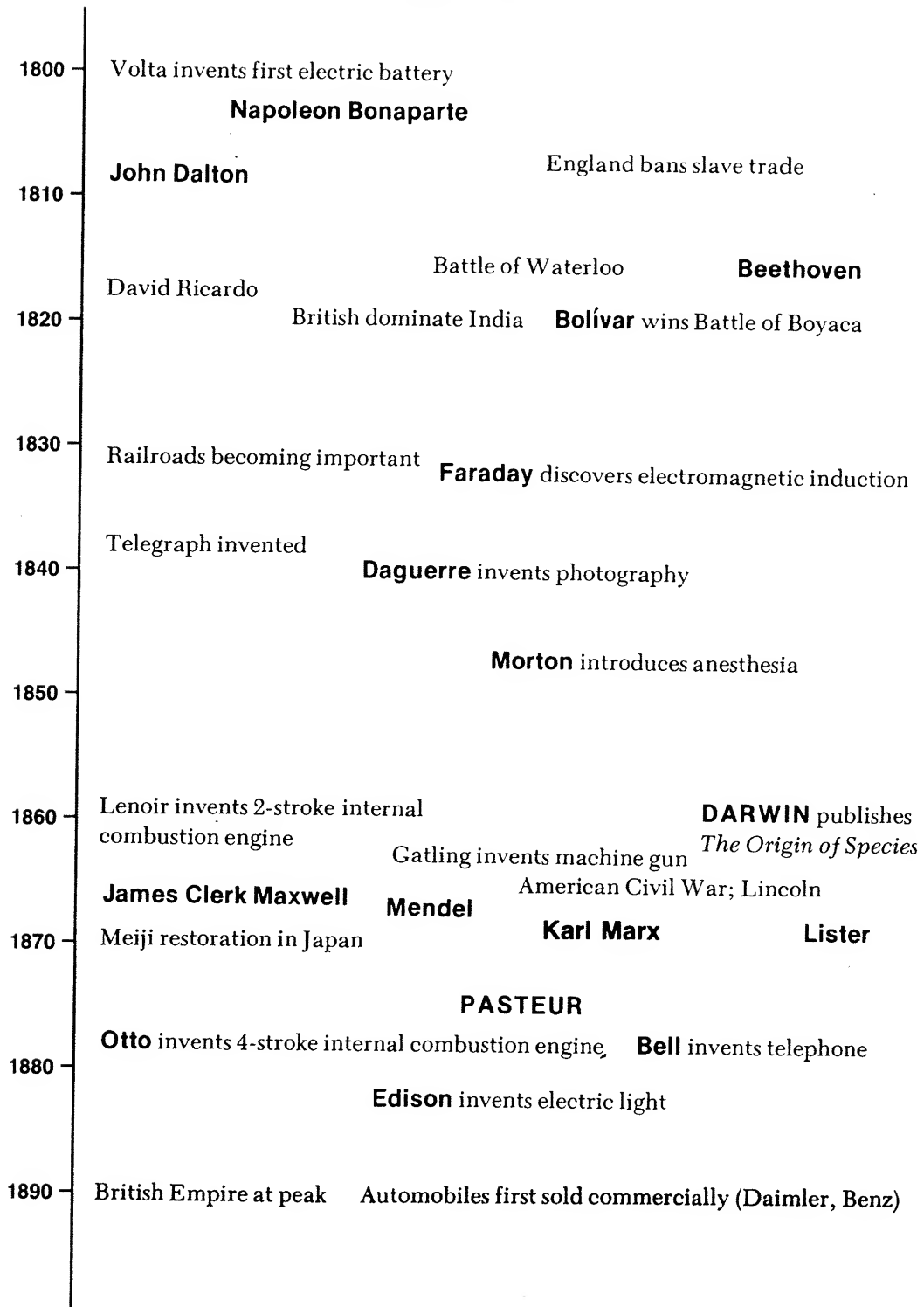






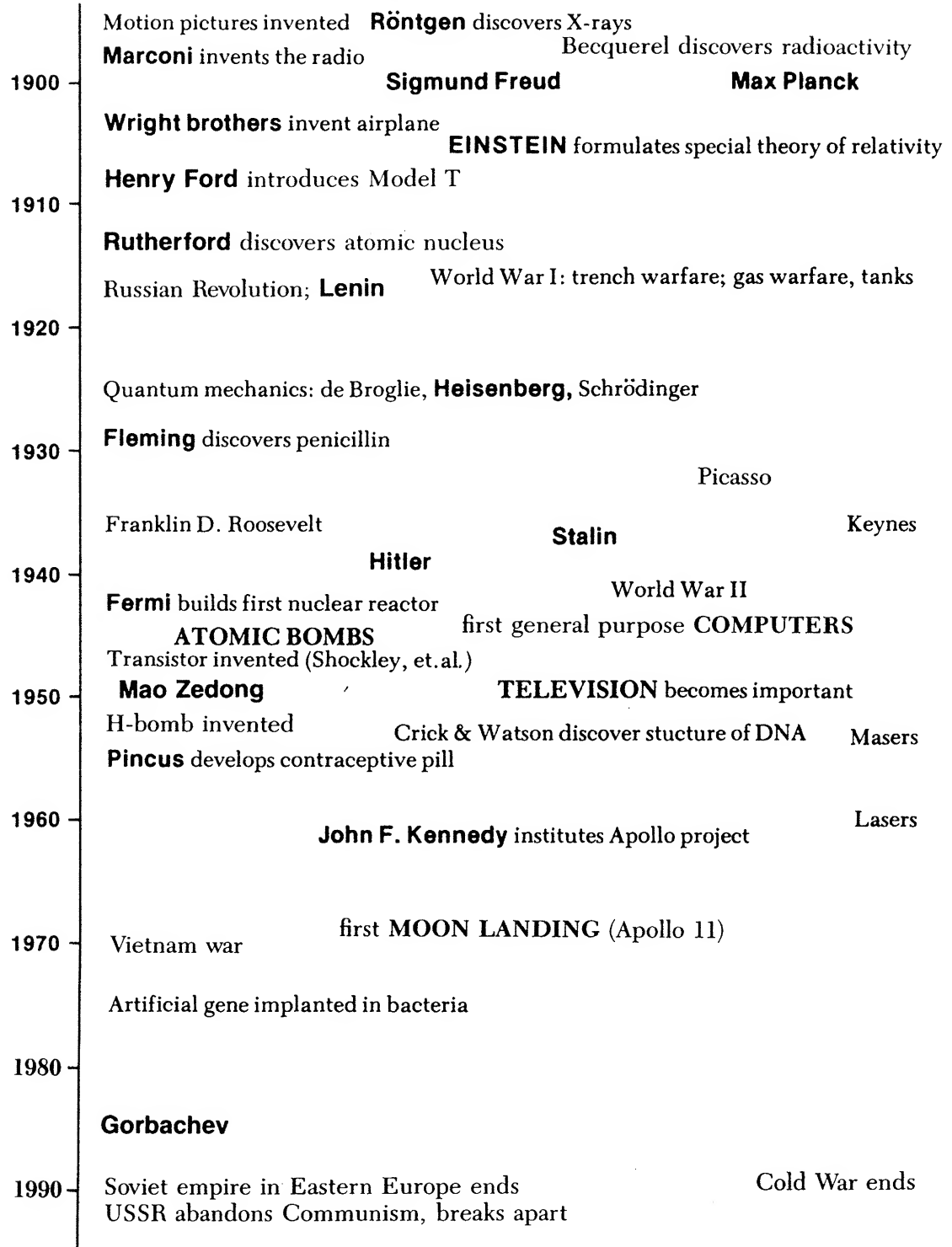






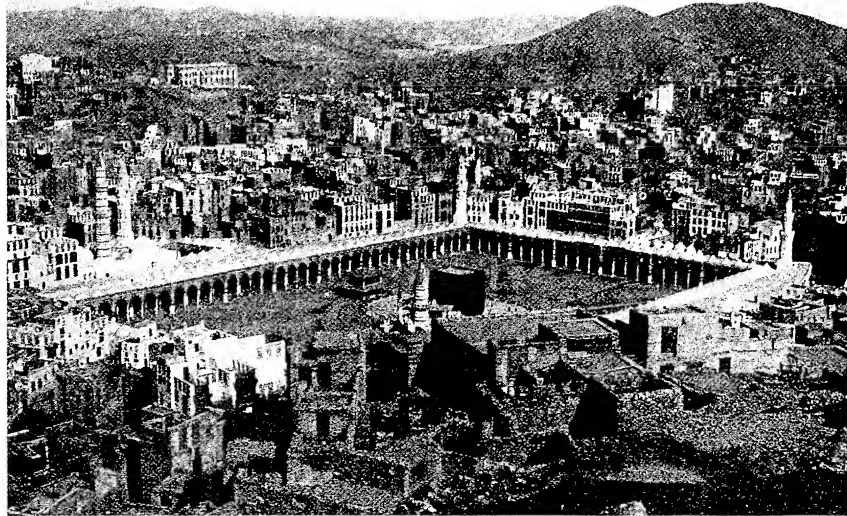
Historical Chart

xxxix



THE 100

*Mecca, the holy city of Islam; the black building at center
is the Kaaba, the sanctuary that houses the black stone.*



I MUHAMMAD 570 - 632

My choice of Muhammad to lead the list of the world's most influential persons may surprise some readers and may be questioned by others, but he was the only man in history who was supremely successful on both the religious and secular levels.

Of humble origins, Muhammad founded and promulgated one of the world's great religions, and became an immensely effective political leader. Today, thirteen centuries after his death, his influence is still powerful and pervasive.

The majority of the persons in this book had the advantage of being born and raised in centers of civilization, highly cultured or politically pivotal nations. Muhammad, however, was born in the year 570, in the city of Mecca, in southern

Arabia, at that time a backward area of the world, far from the centers of trade, art, and learning. Orphaned at age six, he was reared in modest surroundings. Islamic tradition tells us that he was illiterate. His economic position improved when, at age twenty-five, he married a wealthy widow. Nevertheless, as he approached forty, there was little outward indication that he was a remarkable person.

Most Arabs at that time were pagans, and believed in many gods. There were, however, in Mecca, a small number of Jews and Christians; it was from them, most probably, that Muhammad first learned of a single, omnipotent God who ruled the entire universe. When he was forty years old, Muhammad became convinced that this one true God (Allah) was speaking to him (through the Archangel Gabriel) and had chosen him to spread the true faith.

For three years, Muhammad preached only to close friends and associates. Then, about 613, he began preaching in public. As he slowly gained converts, the Meccan authorities came to consider him a dangerous nuisance. In 622, fearing for his safety, Muhammad fled to Medina (a city some 200 miles north of Mecca), where he had been offered a position of considerable political power.

This flight, called the *Hegira*, was the turning point of the Prophet's life. In Mecca, he had had few followers. In Medina, he had many more, and he soon acquired an influence that made him virtually an absolute ruler. During the next few years, while Muhammad's following grew rapidly, a series of battles were fought between Medina and Mecca. This war ended in 630 with Muhammad's triumphant return to Mecca as conqueror. The remaining two and one-half years of his life witnessed the rapid conversion of the Arab tribes to the new religion. When Muhammad died, in 632, he was the effective ruler of all of southern Arabia.

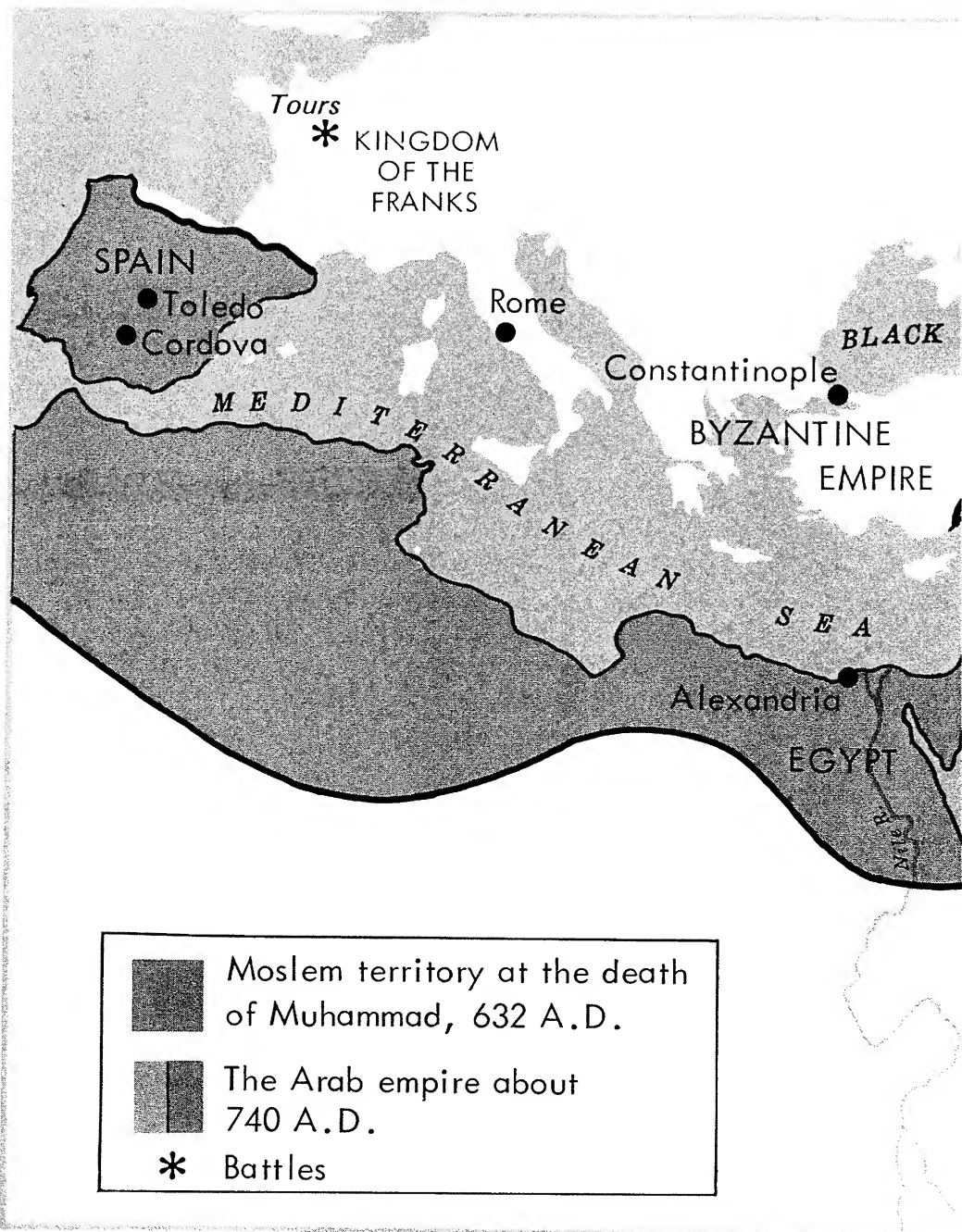
The Bedouin tribesmen of Arabia had a reputation as fierce warriors. But their number was small; and plagued by disunity and internecine warfare, they had been no match for the larger armies of the kingdoms in the settled agricultural areas to the north. However, unified by Muhammad for the first time in

history, and inspired by their fervent belief in the one true God, these small Arab armies now embarked upon one of the most astonishing series of conquests in human history. To the northeast of Arabia lay the large Neo-Persian Empire of the Sassanids; to the northwest lay the Byzantine, or Eastern Roman Empire, centered in Constantinople. Numerically, the Arabs were no match for their opponents. On the field of battle, though, it was far different, and the inspired Arabs rapidly conquered all of Mesopotamia, Syria, and Palestine. By 642, Egypt had been wrested from the Byzantine Empire, while the Persian armies had been crushed at the key battles of Qadisiya in 637, and Nehavend in 642.

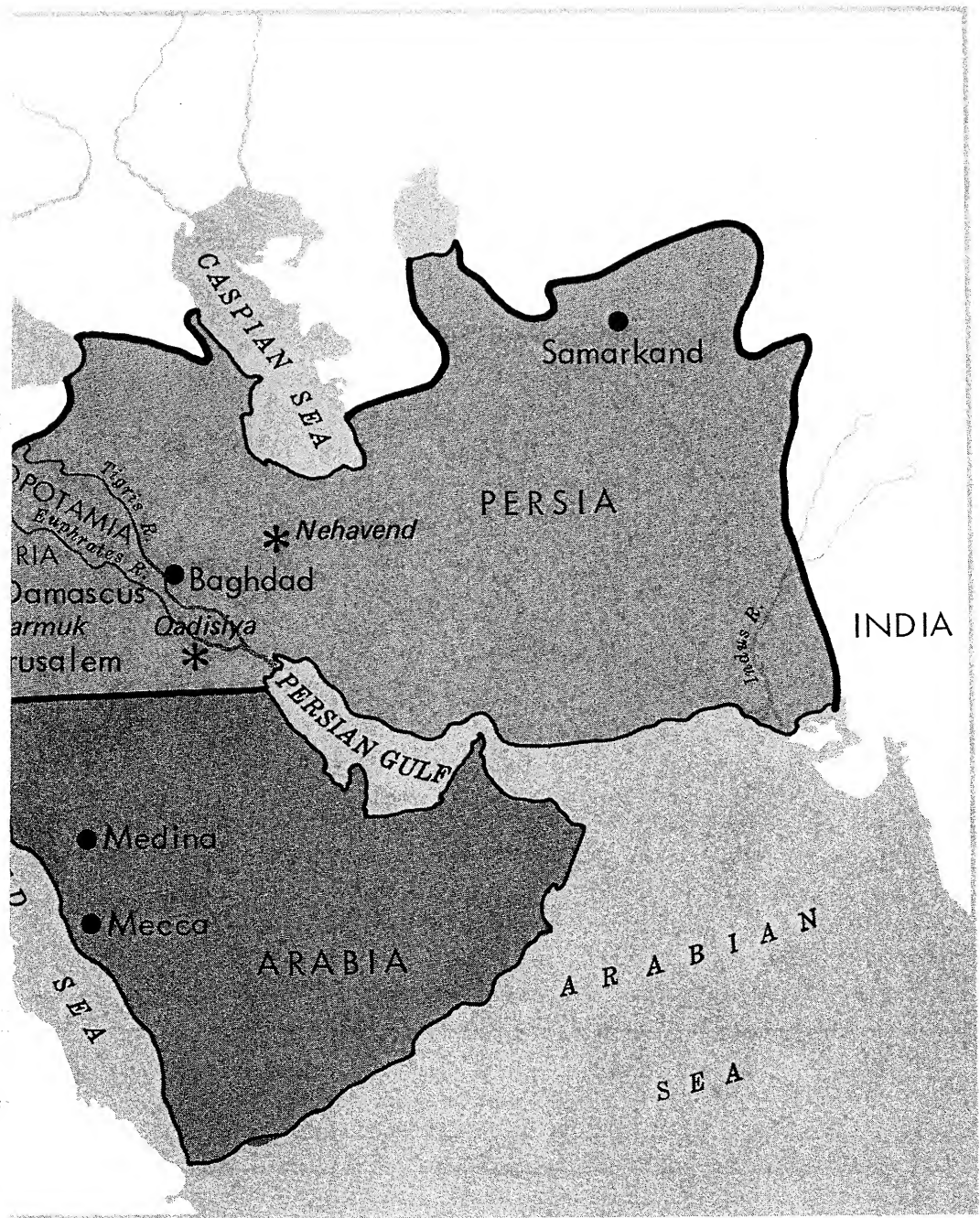
But even these enormous conquests—which were made under the leadership of Muhammad's close friends and immediate successors, Abu Bakr and 'Umar ibn al-Khattab—did not mark the end of the Arab advance. By 711, the Arab armies had swept completely across North Africa to the Atlantic Ocean. There they turned north and, crossing the Strait of Gibraltar, overwhelmed the Visigothic kingdom in Spain.

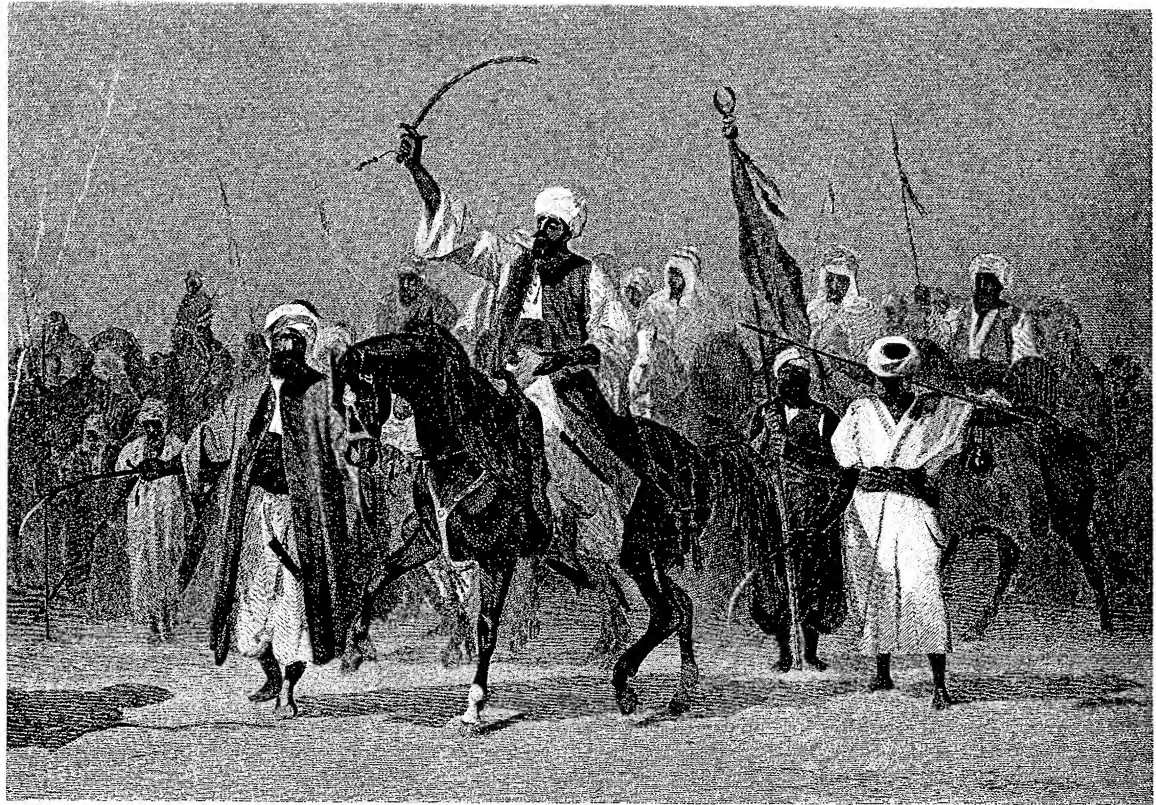
For a while, it must have seemed that the Moslems would overwhelm all of Christian Europe. However, in 732, at the famous Battle of Tours, a Moslem army, which had advanced into the center of France, was at last defeated by the Franks. Nevertheless, in a scant century of fighting, these Bedouin tribesmen, inspired by the word of the Prophet, had carved out an empire stretching from the borders of India to the Atlantic Ocean—the largest empire that the world had yet seen. And everywhere that the armies conquered, large-scale conversion to the new faith eventually followed.

Now, not all of these conquests proved permanent. The Persians, though they have remained faithful to the religion of the Prophet, have since regained their independence from the Arabs. And in Spain, more than seven centuries of warfare finally resulted in the Christians reconquering the entire peninsula. However, Mesopotamia and Egypt, the two cradles of ancient civilization, have remained Arab, as has the entire coast of North



Muhammad and the Arab conquests.





Moslem crusaders under Muhammad conquer in Allah's name.

Africa. The new religion, of course, continued to spread, in the intervening centuries, far beyond the borders of the original Moslem conquests. Currently, it has tens of millions of adherents in Africa and Central Asia, and even more in Pakistan and northern India, and in Indonesia. In Indonesia, the new faith has been a unifying factor. In the Indian subcontinent, however, the conflict between Moslems and Hindus is still a major obstacle to unity.

How, then, is one to assess the overall impact of Muhammad on human history? Like all religions, Islam exerts an enormous influence upon the lives of its followers. It is for this reason that the founders of the world's great religions all figure prominently in this book. Since there are roughly twice as many Christians as Moslems in the world, it may initially seem strange that

Muhammad has been ranked higher than Jesus. There are two principal reasons for that decision. First, Muhammad played a far more important role in the development of Islam than Jesus did in the development of Christianity. Although Jesus was responsible for the main ethical and moral precepts of Christianity (insofar as these differed from Judaism), it was St. Paul who was the main developer of Christian theology, its principal proselytizer, and the author of a large portion of the New Testament.

Muhammad, however, was responsible for both the theology of Islam and its main ethical and moral principles. In addition, he played the key role in proselytizing the new faith, and in establishing the religious practices of Islam. Moreover, he is the author of the Moslem holy scriptures, the Koran, a collection of Muhammad's statements that he believed had been divinely inspired. Most of these utterances were copied more or less faithfully during Muhammad's lifetime and were collected together in authoritative form not long after his death. The Koran, therefore, closely represents Muhammad's ideas and teachings and, to a considerable extent, his exact words. No such detailed compilation of the teachings of Christ has survived. Since the Koran is at least as important to Moslems as the Bible is to Christians, the influence of Muhammad through the medium of the Koran has been enormous. It is probable that the relative influence of Muhammad on Islam has been larger than the combined influence of Jesus Christ and St. Paul on Christianity. On the purely religious level, then, it seems likely that Muhammad has been as influential in human history as Jesus.

Furthermore, Muhammad (unlike Jesus) was a secular as well as a religious leader. In fact, as the driving force behind the Arab conquests, he may well rank as the most influential political leader of all time.

Of many important historical events, one might say that they were inevitable and would have occurred even without the particular political leader who guided them. For example, the South American colonies would probably have won their independence from Spain even if Simón Bolívar had never lived. But

this cannot be said of the Arab conquests. Nothing similar had occurred before Muhammad, and there is no reason to believe that the conquests would have been achieved without him. The only comparable conquests in human history are those of the Mongols in the thirteenth century, which were primarily due to the influence of Genghis Khan. These conquests, however, though more extensive than those of the Arabs, did not prove permanent, and today the only areas occupied by the Mongols are those that they held prior to the time of Genghis Khan.

It is far different with the conquests of the Arabs. From Iraq to Morocco, there extends a whole chain of Arab nations united not merely by their faith in Islam, but also by their Arabic language, history, and culture. The centrality of the Koran in the Moslem religion and the fact that it is written in Arabic have probably prevented the Arab language from breaking up into mutually unintelligible dialects, which might otherwise have occurred in the intervening thirteen centuries. Differences and divisions between these Arab states exist, of course, and they are considerable, but the partial disunity should not blind us to the important elements of unity that have continued to exist. For instance, neither Iran nor Indonesia, both oil-producing states and both Islamic in religion, joined in the oil embargo of the winter of 1973-74. It is no coincidence that all of the Arab states, and only the Arab states, participated in the embargo.

We see, then, that the Arab conquests of the seventh century have continued to play an important role in human history, down to the present day. It is this unparalleled combination of secular and religious influence which I feel entitles Muhammad to be considered the most influential single figure in human history.